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SUBJECT: G/TIP AMBASSADOR LUIS CDEBACA'S VISIT TO UAE

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11. (SBU) Summary. During his November 9-11 visit to the United Arab Emirates, Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, head of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP), met with senior federal and emirate-level officials, and toured government and foreign shelters. UAE officials said they welcomed USG advice and assistance in the fight against human trafficking. CdeBaca shared some of the USG's own anti-trafficking methods and stressed that the UAE must also place priority upon labor trafficking issues. End Summary.

12. (SBU) In Abu Dhabi, CdeBaca, joined by the Ambassador, met with Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Anwar Gargash, Chairman of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT). CdeBaca also met with Deputy Minister of Interior (MOI) General Saif Abdullah Al Shafar, Director of the Ministry of Interior's Human Rights Department Colonel Ahmed Mohammed Nakhira Al Muharami, Ministry of Labor (MOL) Undersecretary Yousuf Abdulghani, Advisor to the Minister of Labor Alex Zalami, and Labor Attach Nasser Munder from the Philippines Overseas Labor Office. In Dubai, CdeBaca, joined by the Consul General, met with Ministry of Social Affairs Undersecretary Hussein Al Shaikh, Dubai Police Colonel Dr. Mohamed Abdalla Al Mur, NCCHT member Lana Nusseibeh, and staff of the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWC).

Downgrade to Tier 2 Watchlist

13. (SBU) Nearly all of CdeBaca's interlocutors expressed disappointment in the State Department's decision to downgrade the UAE to the Tier 2 Watchlist in the 2009 TIP Report. Following the report's release in June, it was initially unclear if UAE officials would continue to engage on TIP issues, but the government actively supported CdeBaca's visit and, at Gargash's direction, helped organize a broad range of meetings.

14. (SBU) Gargash told CdeBaca the State Department downgraded the UAE when it "changed the goal posts" by emphasizing labor issues while the UAE was focused largely on fighting sexual exploitation. He said the UAE was doing much to combat human trafficking in a region where the issue is widely ignored by other governments. Repeating the comparison, Gargash said "receiving the same rank as a neighboring country doing nothing makes the report irrelevant."

Focus on Laborers

15. (SBU) Gargash acknowledged the need to address trafficking of laborers and domestic servants, who he said willingly pay deposits in their home countries which make them bonded labor when they arrive in the UAE. The government has instructed police, prosecutors, and labor officials to scrutinize recruiting agencies for possible

offenses. Gargash said he was hoping for a "breakthrough" on mass trafficking of workers and predicted it would involve domestic servants.

¶6. (SBU) During a meeting with MOI officials, CdeBaca noted recent UAE media coverage of an agency in the Philippines shut down for illegitimate recruitment practices. Deputy Minister Al Shafar said the source country is the best place to stop trafficking of laborers to the UAE and that MOI officials often cooperated with foreign embassies to share information in such cases.

¶7. (SBU) Al Shafar said an international strategy was necessary to combat mass trafficking of workers and that partnership with the USG was important. He told CdeBaca that MOI was working on new initiatives specific to domestic workers who are outside of the Ministry of Labor's jurisdiction. CdeBaca noted that identifying trafficking victims among domestic workers presented a unique challenge due to their relative seclusion. Colonel Al Muharami, the MOI's representative on the NCCHT, said the Ministry was studying ways to maintain contact with domestic workers in the UAE, noting previous seminars in workplaces and labor camps designed to inform foreign laborers of their rights and where they can get help if needed.

¶8. (SBU) Zalami told CdeBaca the MOL was in the early stages of a pilot project with the governments of India and the Philippines, in consultation with the International Labor Organization (ILO), to improve labor recruiting practices in those countries.

An Integrated Anti-Trafficking Plan

¶9. (SBU) CdeBaca frequently shared with his interlocutors examples of the USG approach to human trafficking, noting the global nature of

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the problem and the potential for countries to learn from the successes and failures of others. CdeBaca stressed the benefit of creating and training specialized units of all relevant parties --- police, prosecutors, investigators, judges, and social workers --- in order to broaden their exposure to human trafficking cases. CdeBaca praised the UAE's collaborative interagency approach as a model that could be successful. Gargash said the NCCHT, created by the UAE's anti-trafficking law, was only two years old but has met 18 times to coordinate law enforcement, labor, health, and social welfare efforts. He also noted the creation of a similarly integrated specialized unit managed by the Dubai Attorney General (reftel).

¶10. (SBU) Gargash said the NCCHT is reviewing the UAE's legal definition of human trafficking, which is currently based on the Palermo Protocol. Other new initiatives for the committee include its first airport advertising campaign in early 2010 and more "victim-sensitive" training sessions for police and prosecutors.

¶11. (SBU) Staff at the DFWC shelter told CdeBaca there was a noticeable change in police attitudes toward human trafficking. Two years ago, Dubai police treated trafficking victims like criminals but this is no longer the case, according to DFWC staff. They attributed the change to joint training sessions sponsored by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) including role-playing between police, NGO staff and trafficking "victims". Another TIP workshop involving shelter and police personnel was scheduled for late November.

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